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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8706
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3923
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RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2008

In Today's Papers

Turkish Forces Destroy PKK Camps in Zap and Move Toward Mount Qandil

All papers report Turkey's Military General Staff (TGS) said on Monday the PKK death toll has reached 153 during the ground offensive into northern Iraq. TGS also said two more Turkish soldiers were killed in fighting, which brings the total Turkish military fatalities since the start of the incursion to 17. Mainstream papers Milliyet and Vatan, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, and Islamist-oriented Zaman say the Zap camp was destroyed. This is a significant victory for Turkish forces because the Zap camp served as the logistical support headquarters of the PKK. Zaman, Yeni Safak, and Cumhuriyet report that Turkish troops headed toward Mount Qandil after they destroyed the PKK camps in Cemco, Avasin, Hakurk, and Zap on Monday. Yeni Safak and Cumhuriyet claim Turkish troops control an area 25-50 km from the border.

Government spokesman Cemil Cicek told the press yesterday the operations target the PKK, not the Kurdish administration of northern Iraq. "Turkish troops will return home when their mission is accomplished," said Cicek. On Monday, President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan were briefed by TGS on the latest developments regarding the ground offensive in northern Iraq. Gul postponed his four-day trip to Africa due to the ongoing Turkish operations in northern Iraq. On Wednesday, a Turkish delegation comprised of Turkish Foreign Ministry officials and TGS officials will travel to Baghdad to explain to the Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish groups the "aim and scope" of the Turkish land offensive in northern Iraq.

On Thursday, funerals for soldiers killed in operations in northern Iraq were held in Ankara, Kayseri, Hatay, and Ardahan. President Gul, Parliament Speaker Toptan, PM Erdogan, TGS Chief Buyukanit, and several other cabinet ministers attended the funerals.

Papers also report around 10,000 people gathered in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir in a rally initiated by the pro-Kurdish DTP to

protest the Turkish ground attacks in northern Iraq. DTP lawmakers Selahattin Demirtas and Aysel Tugluk attended the rally, along with Mayor Osman Baydemir. Former Kurdish MP Leyla Zana spoke at the rally and called for the establishment of a "democratic and autonomous Kurdistan," and called on the Turkish state officials to "talk to the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan" to resolve the Kurdish question. "Give us freedom or death," Zana said, calling for an end to the operations in northern Iraq. Riot police dispersed the crowd by using batons and pepper spray.

On the other hand, papers report White House Spokesperson Dana Perino said the US hopes Turkey's operations in northern Iraq will be "short" and "will not harm civilians"

Editorial Commentary on Kurdish Problem, Turkish Operations in Northern Iraq

"There Is No Comprehensive Package"

Murat Yetkin is pro-American and a respected international affairs analyst.

He wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal (2/26):

"Justice Minister Sahin categorically denied reports that the AKP government is preparing a comprehensive package to address the Kurdish issue. In fact, it's easy to draw conclusions based on the assessments of sources close to Prime Minister and the public remarks from the Justice Minister. Currently, Ankara is completely focused on the military operation and hopes to see the PKK's capacity destroyed. In addition, the ruling AKP is exerting efforts in hopes that Turkey's southeastern provinces, traditionally controlled by pro-Kurdish parties, will become strongholds for the AKP during the upcoming local elections. Because of these two

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issues, it is not realistic to expect the government to propose a series of cultural, political and economic measures in order to solve the Kurdish issue. It seems this situation will change only if the military operations result in a significant blow against the PKK's ability to operate as a formidable threat."

"Operation Sun"

Derya Sazak is a senior columnist and ombudsman for mainstream Milliyet. He is a liberal, but is skeptical about US plans for the region, particularly in Iraq.

He wrote in mainstream Milliyet (2/26):

"Despite the ongoing 'Operation Sun' land operation, there is a significant need to bring political and peaceful solutions to the agenda. The Kurdish problem has resulted in the loss of 40,000 lives during the last 25 years. Despite Turkey's demonstrated military supremacy, the Kurdish problem remains. Thus, the solution must include alternatives outside of military action. For example, the formation of a new parliament with representation from pro-Kurdish parties may provide hope for improved understanding and thus may render the PKK ineffective. While the cross border operation continues with support from the US, Turkey, once again, is looking for a Kurdish solution outside of Turkey and inside northern Iraq. Even though the PKK has suffered from heavy losses, we have also lost 15 of our soldiers in only four days. Attending martyred soldiers' funerals is not enough to solve the problem. Ankara must bring a political plan to the parliament's attention."

'Headscarf Ambiguity' Creates Divisions in Universities

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Taraf, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the ruling AKP government's decision to remove a ban on the headscarf in universities has split the Higher Education Board (YOK) into two sides. On Sunday, YOK Chairman Yusuf Ziya Ozcan issued a written directive instructing all university rectors to allow students wearing headscarves to attend classes. Nine rectors, who are also members of the YOK board, criticized Professor Ozcan for backing the AKP government's view that the constitutional changes have lifted the ban on headscarves in universities. Papers report only 18 out of 115 universities allowed students wearing headscarves to enter the classroom.

On Wednesday, opposition party CHP confirmed it will challenge the headscarf amendments in the Constitutional Court. A fifty-page

petition was signed by lawmakers from the CHP, the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and independent lawmaker Kamer Genc.

"Good Morning, 301"

Liberal Radikal reported that Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said an amendment to Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code will be submitted to parliament as an AKP proposal. Sahin said upper limit of punishment will be reduced and no punishments will be deemed necessary if the violation occurs outside of Turkey. Sahin said "if this proposal is adopted by Turkish parliament, I will stop getting questions related to 301. At the moment, the EU officials' first sentence after we greet them is always 'Good morning, 301?' and I am tired of hearing the same thing."

Hopes Increase for A Settlement in Cyprus

Sabah, Vatan, Zaman, Aksam, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet and others: Papers report that the Christofias' victory in the Greek Cypriot presidential elections has opened a new era for Cyprus. Mainstream Sabah says Christofias already requested an appointment from the UN to arrange talks with Turkish Cypriot President Talat. Mainstream Vatan says that world leaders are encouraging Christofias to seek a settlement in Cyprus. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet draws attention to the words of KKTC President Talat that a settlement could be worked out by the end of the year. Islamist-oriented Zaman is more skeptical about Christofias' remarks and says that "the Greek Cypriot leader gives emphasis to talks, not to settlement."

TV News:

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NTV

Domestic News

- Public sector workers' labor union KESK has urged the AKP government to withdraw a controversial social security reform bill set to be debated at parliament Tuesday.
- A Turkish parliamentary delegation headed by the ruling AKP lawmaker Murat Mercan is to visit Egypt on Tuesday.
- The Labor Ministry has decided to shut down three shipyards in Tuzla in Istanbul for their failure to ensure work safety.

International News

- A Kurdish official told a northern Iraqi Kurdish newspaper the Kurdistan National Parliament will hold an extraordinary convention February 26 regarding the Turkish land offensive in the region.
- The US State Department said on Monday Kosovo will never be part of Serbia again.
- On Monday, Iran and Iraq signed an agreement to cooperate in the infrastructure and services sectors in Baghdad.

WILSON